



March 12, 2004

Three charged with smuggling “vinylized” heroin;

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A two-kilogram block of heroin was allegedly disguised as part of a suitcase

A federal grand jury in Providence has charged three men – two from Rhode Island and one from New York City – with trafficking in heroin that had been chemically altered into a vinyl-like slab, disguised as part of a suitcase, and smuggled from Colombia.

The Office of the United States Attorney, Robin M. Avers, Special Agent in Charge of the Boston Field Office of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Mark R. Trouville, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration, jointly announced two indictments, which were returned on March 10 in U.S. District Court, Providence.

Charged are: **Freddy Alonso Osorio**, 45, of 78 Whirlaway Place, Pawtucket; **Jaime Humberto Restrepo-Mejia**, 34, of Broad Street, Central Falls, and **Willingon Rodriguez-Forero**, 29, of Rego, Park, New York. Customs and DEA agents arrested the three men on February 13 at a gas station on School Street, directly off I-95 in Pawtucket, as Rodriguez attempted to deliver the heroin-lined suitcase to Osorio and Restrepo-Mejia. The three defendants are detained at the Wyatt Federal Detention Center, Central Falls.

At a hearing last month in U.S. District Court, Providence, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers presented evidence that, on February 12, a Customs inspector at Miami International Airport developed suspicions that a suitcase belonging to a man arriving from Colombia contained contraband. Customs agents tested a gray slab that fit the contours of an inside wall of the suitcase and determined that it contained heroin. Further analysis determined that nearly two

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kilograms of heroin had been mixed with a vinyl-like liquid substance and poured into the suitcase where it hardened and appeared to be part of the suitcase.

Customs agents arranged to monitor the delivery of the suitcase to its intended recipients in Rhode Island. On February 13, Rodriguez drove into a gas station on School Street and, a short time later, Osorio and Restrepo-Mejia arrived. They allegedly told Rodriguez that they only wanted the suitcase and that he should dump the contents of the bag. At that point agents arrested the three men.

Agents believe that the alleged traffickers planned to chemically reconvert the heroin to its pure form for distribution. Customs agents have discovered similar “vinylized” heroin previously at Miami International Airport and also at LaGuardia Airport in New York. This is the first known incident in Rhode Island that involved this type of heroin.

One indictment charged Osorio and Restrepo-Mejia with conspiracy to distribute in excess of one kilogram of heroin and attempting to possess with intent to distribute in excess of one kilogram of heroin. The other indictment charges Rodriguez-Forero with conspiracy to distribute in excess of a kilogram of heroin.

An indictment is merely an allegation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Upon conviction, each offense charged in the indictments has a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years imprisonment and a statutory maximum of life imprisonment and a \$4,000,000 fine. Upon conviction, federal sentencing is determined on the basis of guidelines that are based on such factors as the specific nature of an offense and a defendant’s criminal background, if any.

The **Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement** and the **Drug Enforcement Administration** investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Rogers is prosecuting it.